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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002958

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: PM MALIKI: GOI SEEKS TO BUILD ON JAM'S STAND-DOWN  
ORDER

REF: BAGHDAD 2906 (CRISIS IN KARBALA)

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister al-Maliki told the Ambassador SeptemQr 2 that a recent attempt by Moqtada al-Sadr,s Jaysh alQahdi militia (JAM) to seize one of Shi,a Islam,s holiest shrines in Karbala last week had alienated Iraq,s Shi,a masses, and that al-Sadr,s order for the JAM to stand-down for a six-month reorganization period provided the GOI an excellent opportunity to "divide moderates from criminals" within JAM ranks. To this end, he said the GOI would soon announce a ban on weapons in the holy Shi,a towns of Najaf and Karbala; begin a gradual release of 1800 detainees against whom the GOI has no evidence of wrongdoing; and scale back offensive Iraqi Security Force (ISF) strikes against JAM while hitting back at those who defy al-Sadr,s order. He called for close ISF-MNF coordination on political and security steps needed to make the GOI,s new JAM strategy a success, but danced around the question of Iranian support for JAM. He and National Security Advisor al-Ruba,iye urged the USG to provide relief assistance to Karbala and Diyala in order to dispel a Shi,a perception that the USG is only assisting the Sunni province of al-Anbar. End Summary.

JAM,s Post-Karbala Loss of Face "Like a Blessing from God"

¶2. (C) Maliki said that JAM had made a serious mistake by perpetrating the August 27-28 attack on a sacred Shi,a shrine during an important Shi,a pilgrimage (reftel) and that the violence had negatively affected Iraqi Shi,a perceptions of al-Sadr and JAM. He praised the rapid response to the crisis by the Iraqi Army which pushed aside "a corrupt police force in Karbala" to quickly restore order and prevent a JAM win which would have had "serious consequences for all of us." NSA al-Ruba,iye went even further, likening Karbala,s post-attack state to that of "a raped woman" with damage more widespread than reported by the media. He said the attack revealed the JAM,s true non-religious colors in the eyes of the Shi,a majority and betrayed its claim to exist only to protect Shi,a from Sunni violence, exclaiming that JAM,s resulting loss of Shi,a goodwill was "like a blessing from God."

¶3. (C) Maliki stated that JAM,s loss of public prestige, which triggered Sadr,s stand-down call, presented the GOI with a great opportunity to "divide moderates from criminals" within JAM ranks. He said the GOI sought to calm the situation by "extending our hand" to moderates -- Sunni and Shi,a -- and offering a pardon and a welcome to those who break from militia violence and work with the GOI while isolating and using force against those who persist in violent conduct. Maliki maintained that he has contacts within the al-Sadr movement who were appalled by the Karbala

violence and the direction of the movement and are thus amenable to this approach. As first steps to the ultimate goal of dissolving JAM and other militias, Maliki said the GOI would soon announce a ban on weapons in the holy Shi'a towns of Najaf and Karbala; begin a gradual release of 1800 detainees (presumably Sadrists) against whom the GOI has no evidence of wrongdoing; and reduce offensive Iraqi Security Force (ISF) operations against JAM while hitting back at "criminal gangs" that defy al-Sadr's order. He added that he was ordering an investigation into the Karbala fracas.

¶4. (C) Referring to an alleged September 1 MNF action in Sadr City, Maliki called for close GOI-MNF coordination on the political and security steps needed to make the GOI's new JAM strategy a success, and offered to host a meeting with the Ambassador, MNF Commanding General Petraeus and Maliki's political/security team to prevent any GOI/MNF acts which could give JAM elements a ready pretext to resume violence. He failed to directly address the Ambassador's point regarding the importance of ending Iranian support for JAM, stating that the Iranians had asked him for advice when he last visited Tehran and that he told them that dissolution of JAM was important and that he hoped the Iranians will help in this regard.

#### Sectarian Perceptions

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¶5. (C) Clearly sensitive to accusations that he heads a sectarian government, Maliki broached the subject of sectarianism himself by declaring that his Da'wa party is secular in nature and that, after the party's founding, members who favored sectarianism and militias "like Abdel Aziz al-Hakeem" left Da'wa to start rival parties. On a

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similar line, he wondered aloud how his government could be considered sectarian when it had just arrested over 200 Shi'a in Karbala and provided millions of dollars of relief assistance to non-Shi'a victims of terror in Sinjar and other places. He and al-Rubaiye urged the USG to provide relief assistance to areas other than the Sunni-majority Anbar province so as to dispel a perception of a pro-Sunni tilt. For example, Maliki urged increased USG assistance to Karbala and Diyala, explaining that the GOI's capacity to provide relief was already stretched thin and would be insufficient even if all oil revenues were diverted for this purpose. Maliki closed the meeting by saying he would make a brief visit to Brussels in conjunction with his upcoming travel to New York for the UNGA.

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